3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 O117 Murngin O117

(iv) SHEETS OF BARK

The bark sheets were stripped from one of the local stringy-barks (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*). After having selected a tree of a size suitable for his purpose, and one free from knots and cracks, the aboriginal first made two cuts round the circumference of the tree, usually about three feet apart, then, loosening a strip of bark at the lower cut, pulled it upward, leaving a narrow vertical opening. Into this opening the native inserted the point of a sharpened stick, and gently levered the bark from the tree. The whole operation usually occupied about three minutes. The aboriginal then threw the bark, rough outer surface downward, on a large fire for a short time, after which he stripped off the outer fibrous bark until the inner denser portion was about three-sixteenths of an inch thick. In this condition the bark, being particularly flexible, was easily flattened by levelling a patch of sand, placing the bark on top, covering it with more sand, and leaving it until dry. The drying took several days to a fortnight, depending on the humidity of the atmosphere. Normally, these bark sheets were used for building the wet-weather shelters (Pl. 3A) on the inside of which the aborigines spent much of their spare time painting pictures.[47]

The method which I adopted was to ask the men to make bark paintings for me, seldom suggesting a subject. At the end of the day, the artists brought their work to my tent, related the associated myth, and explained the meanings of the designs. Under normal tribal conditions, most of the bark paintings are the result of idle hours, when the artist depicts subjects in which he is most interested. But this is not always so. In the Milingimbi and Oenpelli areas, the old men paint designs on sheets of bark which illustrate secret totemic myths. These are exhibited to the novitiates during their initiation and age-grading ceremonies.[48]

A. THE ARTISTS

Some writers suggest that only a limited number of aboriginal men are employed as artists.[49] This is not so. All men were willing to and could paint, although, naturally, some are more skilled than others. The men shown on Pl. 4 produced bark paintings that belonged to Groote Eylandt, Yirrkalla, Oenpelli and Liverpool River areas respectively.

Pl. 4B is *Nangapiana* from Groote Eylandt, who with his relatives, *Tutaluru* and *Juliauru*, produced many fine bark paintings. Pl. 21E and Pl. 25B are the work of *Nangapiana*. *Mini-mini*, mentioned by Adam,[50] also made a number of paintings. He did not, however, employ the fine brushwork of *Nangapiana*, although the results were attractive and colourful. Pl. 30C is *Mini-mini's* work.

47. As the supply of prepared sheets of bark at Yirrkalla and Oenpelli became exhausted, I provided the artists with sheets of rough-surfaced dark grey and green paper. The paintings on these sheets of paper can be distinguished in the illustrations by the smooth ground.
48. Warner (1937), p. 318; also p. 224.
49. Adam (1951), p. 103.
50. Adam (1951), p. 104.

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OII7 Murngin OII7

ARNHEM LAND: ART, MYTH AND SYMBOLISM

7. DECORATED IMPLEMENTS AND WEAPONS

The aborigines of Australia gain much pleasure from the painting of their implements and weapons. The painted shields of Queensland[12] and the engraved boomerangs of northern New South Wales[13] are typical examples.

In Arnhem Land, where neither the shield nor the boomerang is used, it is the paddles and the spear-throwers which receive the attention of the artists. Warner[14] records that among the aborigines of Milingimbi, 'although the paints dissolve immediately in water, the natives often paint their paddles for the mere pleasure of decorating them and seeing their beauty'. The natives of Groote Eylandt and Yirrkalla paint both their spear-throwers and their paddles. At the latter place the blades of many of the paddles are covered with engraved or painted designs of totemic significance.

(I) PADDLES FROM YIRRKALLA

The Spirit Men, Maranatuer and Bunjinkum

Two brothers, *Maranatuer* and *Bunjinkum*, noted fishermen and hunters, once lived at Jumbara-pinja, a locality on the Pali-pali River which runs into Arnhem Bay.[15] One day the two *Mokoi* speared a particularly large *dua* turtle called *lalibo* (possibly a logger-head),[16] which was so powerful that it towed them far out to sea before they were able to haul the turtle close enough to the canoe to kill it. This accomplished, they paddled back to their camp at Jumbara-pinja, disembowelled the creature and put it on the fire to cook.

Whilst they were waiting, *Maranatuer* looked toward the south and saw the dry-season wind, *timaru*, coming toward them. They were just congratulating each other about this, for the period of the *timaru* wind is the season of maturing fruits and underground tubers, when *Bunjinkum*, looking in the opposite direction, saw *Tjambuwal*, of the wet-season wind, *barn*, approaching. Not wishing to be caught between the two winds the brothers hastily ate the turtle, embarked in their canoe and paddled to Jarkala, an island midway between Elcho and the Wessels. Then, hearing that two other *Mokoi*, *Gunbiri* and *Kaiamburo*, friends of theirs, were living on an adjacent island, the brothers left Jarkala and went to stay with them. The four *Mokoi* still live on that island, although no aborigines have ever seen them.

Plate 111C, D is the obverse and reverse sides of the paddle.

The central vertical panel on Pl. 111C is the River Pali-pali, at Arnhem Bay, along which the brothers paddled their canoe when they were setting out to catch a turtle. The cross-hatched transverse bands on either side of the river indicate the rocks and sand-banks in its bed.

In the middle of Pl. 111D is the canoe and its occupants, *Maranatuer* being at the top and *Bunjinkum* at the bottom. The dark-coloured bands in panel *a*

12. McConnel (1935), pp. 49-68.
13. Davidson (1937), p. 23.
14. Warner (1937), p. 192.
15. Map, Fig. 57.
16. The logger-head turtle (*Caretta caretta*) is known to have reached the weight of two tons.

[text continues on p. 450 452]

5: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1934
O117 Murngin O117

Everyday Life

262 511 Being a purely nomadic people, the greater part of the time of these aborigines is devoted to the procuring of food. The coastal districts of Arnhem Land are much better supplied than the arid areas of the inland, but even there a serious shortage of food is by no means infrequent. Almost all living creatures are eaten, as well as a large variety of roots and berries, but there is ever the daily uncertainty concerning the supplying of the body's needs.

461 517 When not engaged in hunting, the men spend many hours fashioning their weapons and utensils, in which work they display a marked degree of skill and ability. The preparations for, and the actual performance of, ceremonials occupy much time and energy, and in these their love of decorative and dramatic art finds truly remarkable expression.

462 The women are the real burden-bearers. When the camping ground is reached, it is the women who have to prepare the camp and obtain the necessary wood and water. Every day they engage in the search for food, such as the smaller animals, roots, berries, and shell fish. No matter how successful the men have been in their pursuit of larger game, the women must not fail in their daily contribution to the needs of the family. To them also falls the care of the younger children, and the construction of most of the utensils for ordinary use.

854 Great affection is shown by both parents for their children, who are rarely corrected, and whose every whim is responded to.

[142 145] When an aboriginal baby is born it is of a light yellowish colour, but during the course of a week or so darkens to the normal

[302] chocolate-brown of the race. For the purpose of ensuring this deepening of colour, the infant, when two or three days old, is rubbed all over with a mixture of ashes and powdered charcoal.

[856] Immediately after birth the nose is flattened and the nostrils distended by finger pressure. The form of the skull is also moulded by the mid-wife's hands.

853 145 Babies are nursed by their mothers until they are up to four years of age, and during that period are extremely plump and soft-fleshed. After weaning, however, they quickly develop into the spindly-limbed form characteristic of the children of many PRIMITIVE RACES.